

**DRAFT – 9/24/08**  
**N-C BILLBOARD PROPOSAL**

**Introduction** – Staff and the Subcommittee have undertaken a review of nonconforming (N-C) billboard regulatory issues over the past month. This is a major topic and a very large task, and all have given their best effort to this effort, despite a pressing time line. Some surprising statistics on 86% of all GSO billboards being N-C were presented during the work. According to current regulations, all N-C signs are supposed to be removed over time. Proposals to allow them to remain and be rebuilt permanently should only occur with clear community visual improvements resulting. Staff has discussed the various ideas and issues brought up along the way and offers two recommendations to the Subcommittee and Sign Committee.

**Recommendation #1: Support reconstruction of any N-C billboards on the same sites, with “clearly improved appearance” design standards, and allow new signs to achieve conforming status; required standards for these new signs would be:**

1. **Compatible sign frame** – require a frame be constructed on all four sides of any new sign face, equal to at least 10% of the sign face width and height, utilizing materials judged clearly compatible with (or matching of) traditional materials, styles, colors of nearby buildings and structures.
2. **Sign Placement** - when a new sign is located attached to or near a building, it shall be sized and located in an appropriate manner, so as not to cover or substantially block the view of architectural building elements or active windows & doors and not to overhang edges of the building.
3. **Reduced visual impact** – to offset the construction of a permanent, new, conforming sign, the sign must reduce visual impacts as noted:
  - a. **Reduced sign face** – should reduce sign face at least 33%; **AND**
  - b. **Reduced sign height** – should reduce the height of the sign by at least 33%; **OR**
  - c. **Reduce number of sign faces** – with existing multi-face billboard structures, shall reduce the number of faces by one face.
  - d. **External downlighting** – when sign is NOT located along an interstate highway, traditional, top-mounted, goose-neck light fixtures shall be used, with shielded cut-off fixtures to prevent light spillover. No electronic changeable copy signs are permitted.
4. **Landscaping** – to offset the construction of a permanent new sign, landscaping shall be provided on site, either below the sign face or next to the sign in a visible location; if plantings are judged not feasible to be placed on site, a comparable “payment in lieu of” planting may be made to the GBI/City tree planting fund. On-site plantings shall not obscure the view of the sign, shall be primarily evergreen materials and shall fit with Type C (10’ wide) planting yard standards for the sign width.

5. **Rear sign covers** – if the rear of any new sign faces or structures are visible from nearby streets or buildings, the following standards shall be used to reduce the visual impact:
  - a. Shall cover the entire back side of the sign faces and sign frame with permanent, architectural grade finishes, compatible with the surrounding buildings and structures; **OR**
  - b. Shall install and locate public artwork on the back of the sign and frame, so as to maximize its visibility and be judged adequate in coverage to offset the view of the uncovered sign backs; shall coordinate planning, selection and installation of such efforts with the public arts commission and/or the United Arts Council.
6. **Location of sign** – the new sign may be located in the same place on the same property, unless another location within 200 feet is shown to have equal or better performance in fitting with the current or proposed site development and to have no greater visual impact from surrounding streets. The TRC would need to grant a modification for such sign location, after making such findings. If meeting the above guidelines, the site may also be located on an abutting site owned by the same party as the original site.
7. **Conforming status of sign** – if a sign is constructed in full conformance with these “clearly improved appearance” guidelines, the sign shall be considered a fully conforming billboard. Accordingly, provisions of Development Ordinance ***Sec. 30-5-5.11 Nonconforming signs and sign permits***, shall no longer be applicable to such signs.

**Recommendation #2:** While an initial review was begun, there is a short period of time available to study other billboard issues. In particular, there are a number of complex issues needing closer examination on the topic of allowing new billboards in new locations in the community. Accordingly, it is recommended that further study of these issues be postponed beyond the current study effort and revisited following adoption of the Land Development Ordinance, in accordance with direction from the City Council.